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ABSTRACT

Changes in the teacher's authority structure as well as changes in the content of student talk during peer response sessions occur over the course of a school year in a first-grade classroom. In the beginning of the year, the teacher, a beginner in the Teachers College Writing Project, dominated the talk during share sessions, while the students' talk consisted of generic praise and focused on logistical issues about texts. The authority structure changed over the course of the year to allow for students taking more control of the dialogue and focusing on ideas and content within student texts. The change in authority structure seemed to be reflected through a change in the nature of the content of what students say and what they attend to in the texts they hear. The teacher still expressed her control in various ways, however, such as designating who should speak, moving the dialogue along, and offering her own interpretations which tended to constrain alternative interpretations. Even at the end of the year, it was not evident that students built upon one another's ideas in any traceable pattern. These limitations point to the need to change classroom norms and the fact that these are difficult to change, particularly teachers' need for classroom control. (Author/JB)

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NCRTE

National
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on Teacher Education

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TALK ABOUT TEXT: CHANGES IN CONTENT AND AUTHORITY STRUCTURES IN PEER RESPONSE GROUPS

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Abstract

This paper describes the changes in the teacher's authority structure as well as changes in the content of student talk during peer response sessions over the course of a school year in a first-grade classroom. In the beginning of the year, the teacher, Emily Johnson who was beginning her participation in the Teachers College Writing Project, dominated the talk during share sessions, while the students' talk consisted of generic praise and focused on logistical issues about texts. The authority structure changed over the course of the year to allow for students taking more control of the dialogue and focusing on ideas and content within student texts.

TALK ABOUT TEXT: CHANGES IN CONTENT AND AUTHORITY STRUCTURES IN PEER RESPONSE GROUPS[1]

Sarah J. McCarthey[2]

The literature on peer groups in writing suggests a variety of purposes for peer groups depending on teachers' and students' goals: (a) responding to writing, (b) thinking collaboratively, (c) writing collaboratively, and (d) editing writing (DiPardo and Freedman, 1988). Further, groups provide a forum for discussing the writing process, generating ideas, understanding the functions of an audience, and providing support for engaging in writing (Gebhardt, 1980). Much of the research has focused on the goals of responding to writing and editing writing. This research supports the idea that students learn about writing through talking about texts with other students. For instance, Nystrand (1986) found that students produced better revisions and reconceptualized their writing through participation in groups, while Gere and Stevens (1985) found that students attended to the actual text more than the teacher did. Groups can facilitate writing in a variety of ways especially given more structured tasks (Hillocks, 1984), while students arranged collaboratively can solve problems in writing (Freedman, 1987). Students as young as fourth graders can expect and receive substantive help through peer conferencing when conferences focus on improving the author's draft (Dahl, 1988).

Another line of research suggests that conversations among teachers and students about texts are not only valuable for increasing writing performance but are also valuable in increasing other forms of literacy. Tannen (1987) regards orality and literacy, speaking and writing, not as dichotomous but rather as overlapping and intertwined. The benefits claimed for teacher and student discussing texts together include making the writer's knowledge available through talk; supporting the beginner's work through questions, comments, and suggestions of others; and giving the beginning writer the opportunity to practice orally ways of using written language (Calkins, 1987; Florio-Ruane, 1988; Graves, 1983). Students can then transform the conversation-based knowledge and strategies into their independent writing. Additionally, students who engage in talking about their texts reveal their beliefs about literacy as well as their thought processes (Daiute, 1989).

For learning from peers to occur, students need opportunities to interact with one another. The realities of classroom life with its inequitable distribution of knowledge and authority, however, can undermine opportunities for students to understand their writing through responses from the teacher and peers (Cazden, 1986; Florio-Ruane, in press).

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[1]This paper was presented in November 1989 at the National Reading Conference in Austin, Texas.

[2]Sarah J. McCarthey, a doctoral student in teacher education at Michigan State University, is a research assistant at the National Center for Research on Teacher Education. The author thanks Susan Florio-Ruane, Taffy Raphael, Douglas Campbell, and Mary Kennedy for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

Traditional classroom norms limit opportunities for students to interact with the result that peer interactions are rare. Large-group instruction with the teacher in control and children working alone on individual tasks persists in most American schools (Cazden, 1988; Goodlad, 1984).

Ordinarily, teachers dominate instructional talk and control access to the floor. The teacher selects topics for discussion, asks questions to which she knows the answer in order to find out what students know about a topic, and allocates turns after students bid for the floor (Coulthard, 1977). The typical pattern of interaction is for teachers to initiate instructional talk, for students to respond, and then for teachers to evaluate their responses (Mehan, 1982). The teacher, then, has the authority and control over the conversational interaction within the classroom. Children learn at a very young age that the teacher makes virtually all initiating moves and that students are expected to respond to the teacher's initiation (Willes, 1983). These norms limit opportunities for students to try out their own ideas, to confront alternative theories to the teacher's, and to respond to their peers.

Several current writing programs encourage transforming traditional patterns of teacher-student interaction into more dynamic student-centered and student-controlled interactions by creating opportunities for students to learn from one another (cf. Calkins, 1987; Graves, 1983). In these programs, teachers organize the classroom to support daily writing, publish students' work in a variety of forms, and interact with students through conferences in which they encourage children in their writing. Students choose their own topics to write about, discuss their work with peers, and share their writing in more formal settings called "share sessions" or whole-group response sessions.

These share sessions provide opportunities for students to confront alternative ideas, to enact complementary roles, to have a relationship with an audience, and to try out new ideas (Cazden, 1988). Share sessions differ from traditional classroom interaction in several ways. First, the goal is for students to share their written texts with others, not for the teacher to find out what children know already about a topic. Second, the share sessions are focused on the student/author who sits in a special chair designated as the "author's chair" and calls upon students to respond to the text (Graves and Hansen, 1983). The student/author may control topic selection by asking students for specific help on a problem the author has. Third, the teacher's role is as an additional respondent or one who takes on the role of clarification of discussion.

Share sessions have the potential to change authority structures in classrooms as well as to contribute to students' learning. Because learning through peers is linked to changes in authority structures, research is needed to examine how students' interactions change in settings that actively seek to alter traditional norms. Research on share sessions is important because the dialogue which students engage in can provide a means of finding out what students know about text.

Purposes of the Study

This study follows from previous research that highlights students learning from one another about texts, while adding the dimension of investigating changing classroom norms in a particular setting where the teacher has provided opportunities for students to interact with one another. Two questions guide this study of one first grade classroom: (a) How do norms of authority in this classroom change during the course of the school year? and (b) How does the content of what children say in the share sessions change during the course of the school year?

Method

Context

Students. The focus of this study is the first grade classroom of Emily Johnson.[3] Twenty students of various ethnic backgrounds including black, Hispanic, Asian, and Caucasian are in Ms. Johnson's classroom, located in an elementary school in the New York City Public Schools. The students are not grouped by ability for instruction but are provided whole-group instruction, small heterogeneously grouped instruction, or individual instruction during writing time.

Teacher. Emily Johnson is an experienced elementary school teacher who has taught in the New York City Public Schools for four years. During the summer preceding the 1987 school year she became involved in the Teachers College Writing Project where she received instruction in helping students learn to write.

Program. The purpose of the Writing Project is to involve students in the process of what real authors do--recording ideas, planning, organizing texts to make sense of their lives (Calkins and Harwayne, 1987). The role of the teacher is to establish a predictable structure for the teacher and students to interact daily about writing. The focus of this study is on one part of that predictable structure--the share sessions in which several student/authors read their pieces aloud to the whole group and the other students respond to the texts.

Classroom. Ms. Johnson's classroom is organized around a rug occupying a central place in the room. Situated throughout the room are tables and chairs that students are free to use. Books are on display and accessible to children during the day. During writing time children may choose where to sit to write; they sit at tables, in chairs, use pillows or sit on the floor.

Ms. Johnson calls the share sessions by announcing that it is time for students to share. The students sit on the floor in a circle around the rug. The teacher also sits on the

[3]All names of teachers and students are pseudonyms.

floor. The student/author who has been designated by the teacher earlier during writing time is called upon by the teacher to share his/her work. The student goes to the "author's chair" and reads his/her text. The student/author then calls on students who have their hands raised to respond to the text. During the share sessions, two to three students share their pieces that are either considered "finished" by the author or are still in progress.

Data Collection Procedures

Ms. Johnson's classroom was observed three times during writing time over the course of the 1987-88 school year (October, December, and May). Each of the writing periods consisted of about one hour divided among a "minilesson" in which the teacher explained a concept to the students, writing/conferencing time in which students wrote and the teacher spent time with individuals discussing their writing, and the share sessions. The observations were audiotaped using a wireless microphone worn by the teacher. The observer transcribed the observations into narratives containing the actual dialogue of the members of the class. Although this study is limited by having only three data points, it has the advantage of providing data over time.

Analysis

The analysis is rooted in classroom discourse theory and methodology outlined by Cazden (1986) as well as conversational analysis detailed by West and Zimmerman (1982). The central idea of turn-taking and turn-allocation (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1978) contributed to the analysis. However, new categories have been generated in order to talk more specifically about Ms. Johnson's classroom.

Initially, I drew from several sources to define my unit of analysis. I combined the idea of "speech events"--defined as recurring, bounded events with a clear beginning and end with consistent rules for participation--(Cazden, 1988; Hymes, 1972) with the notion of "literacy events"--including "occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies" in which "participants follow socially established rules for verbalizing what they know from and about the written material" (Heath, 1982, p. 50) to form the "text/speech event" as the unit of analysis. The unit began when a student/author read his or her piece, included the conversation during his or her allotted time to read and respond, and ended with another student being called upon to "share." Several different types of analysis of each of the "text-speech events" were performed.

First, to address the issue of changing norms of authority I analyzed two main features of the dialogue. I attended to the turn allocation pattern of discourse between teacher and students and among students and to the use of discourse features such as imperatives, elicitation, evaluation, or informative statements. Turn allocation is an important feature

in describing authority relationships in discourse, as analysts such as Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1978) maintain, because in American society turns are highly valued and because the first speaker has control over subsequent speakers. Through turn allocation and selection of the next speaker, the current speaker can assert control. Thus, turn allocation and the number and lengths of turns become indicators of who has control of speaking rights.

Another feature helpful in describing authority relationships and changing norms is the way in which a teacher and students respond. To understand how authority relations might change, I drew from previous researchers and combined features from their work to form my own categories (cf. Mehan, 1982, who uses the categories of teacher initiation, student response, and teacher evaluation and Willes, 1983, who classifies interaction into directives, elicitations, informatives, and nominations by the teacher and reactions or replies by the student). My categories include the following teacher responses: (a) imperatives that direct a child to say or do something, usually taking a form such as "Repeat what you said" or "You talk to Billy"; (b) elicitations in which the teacher asks students a question such as "Did you hear what she said?" or "Why did you do that?" (c) informatives in which the teacher comments, clarifies, or provides information; and (d) evaluations in which the teacher provides praise such as "Good question" or criticism. Student responses are divided into the following categories: (a) praising the work of another student through statements such as "I like your story"; (b) answering the question of another student; (c) defending a response by supplying more information and a rationale for including something in the text; (d) asking a question of another student; and (e) challenging the response of a student by giving a different opinion.

To gain insights about the students' learning about text the second type of analysis examined what both the teacher and the students said. Drawing from the work of Dahl (1988) who examined content of peer conferences focused on revision, I formed my own categories. I categorized student responses into responses either to ideas in the text or mechanics (which included surface features of the text such as number of pages). I attended to whether the student responded to the entire text or details of the text and whether the students responded to features of the stories such as plot, characters, or setting or more general concepts such as scientific concepts.

Results

October

The October interactions reveal several interesting features about the authority structure in the classroom as well as the content of the discussions about student texts. The following excerpt illustrates how the teacher establishes a traditional authority structure in

the classroom. The interactions follow Mehan's (1982) teacher-initiation, student-response, teacher-evaluation pattern with the teacher allocating turns and dominating the talk:

Teacher:	Who remembers the rules? What do we do when someone is talking?
Jill:	Be quiet.
Teacher:	Yes. What else? Being quiet is important but something else is even more important to me.
Jenny:	Listen to the other person.
Teacher:	Did you hear what she said? And maybe you were not doing what she said. (To Jenny) Repeat what you said.
Jenny:	Listen to the other person when they are talking.

The teacher asks questions which students respond to and then she evaluates the student's response and requests additional information from other students. A significant proportion of the teacher's talk consists of explicit imperatives such as "Repeat what you said" or implicit evaluations of student behavior such as "And maybe you were not doing what she said." The talk of the students, too, is filled with imperatives such as "Be quiet" and "Listen to the other person," indicating that they had internalized imperatives the teacher may have used previously. The teacher also relies on elicitation of replies that seem to have a "right answer" such as "Who remembers the rules? What do we do when someone is talking?"

Throughout the session the teacher does much of the talking and encouraging of student interaction, while offering her own evaluations of the students' responses. For instance, after Louisa reads her text, Louisa calls on Shannon and the teacher prompts Shannon to be more specific.

Shannon:	I like that story.
Teacher:	What did you like about it?
Shannon:	I like that because [it was] fun and I liked the part about being seasick.
Teacher:	Good.

Even though the student/author is allowed to call on respondents of her choice, the teacher is evaluating students' responses. The teacher takes as many turns as students to continue the pattern of teacher-initiation, student-response, teacher-evaluation. The student/author does very little responding, but does continue to call on other students.

When examining the content of students' responses, it seems that students have not developed very sophisticated ways of responding. For instance, their responses are quite generic in relation to the text and become more specific only with teacher prompting. In

the sequence following Laurie's reading of her story, students' responses are confined to positive praising of the story as a whole. Linda replies that it was a "nice" story and, when prompted, gives another general kind of answer, "I like that story."

Teacher: Anybody want to say anything about that?
Linda: [It was] nice.
Teacher: Why did you think it was nice?
Linda: I like that story.
Teacher: Why?
Linda: I like that part about when they went to school in the snow.
Teacher: (to Laurie) That makes you feel happy when they tell you that about your writing, doesn't it?

Students also tend to focus their responses on logistical types of issues as this sequence illustrates:

Cathy: Did you do all the pages? All the pages in the book, how come you only read [a few]?
Jack: (does not respond)
Teacher: Is it finished yet, Jack?
Jack: I think I can make another page tomorrow.

In this response both the teacher and the students seem concerned with such issues as the number of pages in the story and whether the piece is finished.

In the three small vignettes that occurred during the share sessions in October the teacher establishes a traditional authority structure. In each of the sequences, the teacher's voice is heard the most often. She maintains order by asking questions about management and elicits what she considers appropriate answers from students such as "Be quiet" and "Listen to the other person." The students answer the question the teacher poses. Even when she makes a statement such as "That makes you feel happy when they tell you about your writing, doesn't it?" it is really a rhetorical question in which the teacher is seeking agreement rather than a question to which the teacher wants an answer. Although the teacher's voice is gentle in tone, what child under these conditions would feel comfortable saying, "No, it doesn't make me happy?" The teacher does not ask any questions or make comments herself about the content of the students' pieces. Her role seems to direct students in making responses.

December

In December, I noticed a shift in the authority structure in the classroom. The teacher's role is to maintain management, provide the overall structure, and occasionally clarify responses, but it is the student/author who is in charge of turn-taking and responds to what she feels is important. The following discussion takes place after Emily reads her story about summer.

Emily: (reads her text) The summer. I live in this house. I live in this house in the summer. This is the house where my little. . . . I have a little shelter in the woods. Hi ho hi ho hi ho. This is my rabbit and he goes tweet tweet tweet. This is the biggest rabbit . . . rainbow. This is Jennifer and Douglas walking in the park. This is Jennifer and Douglas going to the park. One day Jennifer the boy and the girl went to the park.

Students: (make noises)

Emily: Not Jennifer and Douglas. It is another one (continues reading). One day the boy and the girl went to the park.

Teacher: Comments? Questions? Only people with hands up are called on, should be talking.

Emily: (calls on Ron)

Ron: [Why] were there little things?

Emily: It was summer.

Ron: I know. Were there little things?

Teacher: I know what you mean. Everything she wrote about was little. Snails and what else?

Ron: Rabbits.

Teacher: Let her comment on that, please.

Emily: Everything is little because if I made them big, I wouldn't fit everything in, right? This is a folded paper.

Rick: I think you have too many staples.

Teacher: There are a lot of things to say, but let Emily call on you.

Alison: Why didn't you say kissing? It was Tina and Matt.

Teacher: Other questions?

Juanita: How come "tweet, tweet, tweet"?

Emily: The rabbit didn't go "tweet, tweet," he went "ha ha." It was a bird that went "tweet, tweet" and his name was tweet, tweet. And there was a rabbit who went "Hi-o." Raise your hand if you want to ask me his name.

Teacher: That is a good question. I want to see what it has to do with the rest of the story.

Emily: I wanted to . . .

Jason: Is Tina and Matt . . . why did you pick them?

Emily: Because it was a boy and a girl and I didn't want to get anybody excited.

This interaction demonstrates several related issues with regard to changes in authority and content. Several subtle shifts are evident in the teacher's authority role. In terms of the amount of teacher response, there is clearly a shift from October. Whereas in October the pattern of interaction was teacher, student, teacher, student, in the December excerpt the students' voices are much more apparent. Ron has two opportunities to ask his question, "Were there little things?" and participates in the dialogue by responding that there were "rabbits" when asked by the teacher. The response patterns among students and the teacher are much more variable with students as a group having more turns to speak than the teacher.

The student/author's voice comes across more clearly as well. She has several opportunities to explain why she included certain aspects in her text such as "If I made them big, I wouldn't fit everything in, right?" and she has the opportunity to explain that "the rabbit didn't go 'tweet, tweet, tweet.'" She defends choosing the characters she did by saying, "Because it was a boy and a girl and I didn't want to get anybody excited." These examples provide evidence that the student/author seems to perceive herself as the authority about her text rather than the teacher being the sole authority.

The teacher's talk is somewhat different too. She still uses imperatives including, "Only people with hands up are called on, should be talking" and "Let her comment on that, please." However, the directive that only students with their hands up should be responding is more implicit and has a gentler tone. She includes the word "please" at the end of one of her imperatives; this indicates a less authoritative role--teachers don't have to say "please" in traditional settings, because it is incumbent upon the student to obey. The teacher gives over some of her own authority to the student by saying, "Let her comment on that, please" and "Let Emily call on you" emphasizing that the student/author is the one who ought to call on people and comment upon the responses of students.

The teacher continues to do some evaluation of student responses. For instance, she says, "That is a good question. I want to see what it has to do with the rest of the story." Yet her evaluation leads her to make a comment as a respondent of the text, rather than in a traditional teacher role. Through this comment about wanting to know what it has to do with the rest of the story the teacher shows a genuine interest in the text, not just in sustaining order. Her interest in the text itself is also notable in her saying, "I know what you mean. Everything she wrote about was little. Snails and what else?" Although the teacher seems to be more of a respondent than in the October session, she does still use some traditional dominating strategies. She provides her own interpretation of the text by saying, "Everything she wrote about was little," and still elicits from students other examples of little things; students are expected to respond to the teacher's questions, not necessarily to the text.

The change in authority structure seems to be reflected through a change in the nature of the content of what students say and what they attend to in the texts they hear. In the December share session, students ask more questions that are related to the text such as, "Were there little things?" and "Why didn't you say kissing?" or "How come 'tweet, tweet, tweet'?" Of the seven student responses, only one is about a logistical or noncontent-related issue, "I think you have too many staples." The other responses have to do with characters in the story such as "It was Tina and Matt" or questions asking about the inclusion of certain elements. The student/author is able to provide a rationale for what she included in her text, while providing details and taking the questions seriously. Unlike what occurred in the October session, students do not just provide generic praise but rather try to understand what the author was trying to say. Since there are many places in the text that seem unclear to the audience, the respondents show a genuine interest in understanding the text. In general, the talk among students and the teacher appears to have more complexity than in the October session because students are trying to respond to the content of the text.

May

Both the norms of authority and the content of what students say undergo further shifts in the May share session. The teacher-student authority roles seem to be more dynamic and fluid. The teacher tries to explain and clarify issues and moves the discussion to other respondents' questions. The number and type of imperatives have decreased significantly from the October session. Towards the end of the discussion about Shelley's piece, the teacher uses an imperative to close the discussion by saying, "OK, Billy, you talk to Shelley about that later." However, it is the only imperative in this sequence and she directs the student's attention towards asking the student/author about the issue in the future. Instead of directing the session, the teacher is facilitating the discussion, asking students to clarify their ideas, and informing students of her own interpretation of the story. Many of the former imperatives and traditional elicitation of students' answers are not apparent in the following sequence taken from the May session:

Shelley: (reads her story.) This is a song. "Rain rain, go away. Rain, rain, go away, come back another day." I don't like the rain. Do you know why I don't like the rain? Because the rain gets in your face. I like the sun. Do you know why I like it? It's because it does not, does not get in your face. [when another student interrupts] I'm not finished . . .

Teacher: OK. Now thinking about Shelley's question that she had of you, let's see if your questions can help Shelley.

Billy: How come you say rain can get in your face and sun can't get in your face?

Shelley: It can't, but it doesn't come in your eyeball.

Billy: Because the sun can go down, because it still can come down. It gets on you like just . . . it can only like vanish . . . Anytime I look . . . [when a student tries to interrupt] Wait I'm not finished.

Teacher: Well, what do you think Billy is saying?

Joshua: I think he said in the night the sun don't come up.

Billy: I said the sun can come, the sun can come down, but it can come up.

Shelley: But it can't come down like the rain comes.

Billy: I know that but rain hits water. Rain is . . .

Teacher: I think what she's doing, Billy. I think she has two different things, and I think that she is comparing the two. Do you see how she is comparing the two? She's saying how she doesn't like the rain and the reason she doesn't like it is because it can get in her face. She likes the sun and the reason she likes the sun is because it doesn't come down and touch, get in her face. It can. You can feel the heat. Is that what you are talking about?

Billy: Yeah, and it feels like . . .

Teacher: And it hurts your eyes. Yeah, but she means really come down, Billy, and touch you.

Billy: Like it rain . . .

Teacher: OK, Billy, you talk to Shelley about that later about this. Maybe in writing tomorrow, but right now there are other people that need to talk to Shelley about . . .

In the sequence above, the teacher does take 5 of the 13 turns and several of those turns are extended turns. However, her statements are not explicitly evaluative of the student's responses. Twice she tries to clarify what she thinks the student/author is saying. For instance, she says, "I think she has two different things, and I think she is comparing the two." Later on, she adds, "And it hurts your eyes. Yeah, but she means really come down, Billy, and touch you."

The student/author has some authority over her text since she can explain what she meant in her story. The student/author's authority is challenged, however, by the student, Billy, who persists in suggesting that the sun "can come down" and "get on you like [the rain]." At first, the teacher encourages the students to try and explain their conflicting positions. Billy persists in his reasoning, while Shelley continues with her explanation about the differences between the sun and the rain. The authority structure is temporarily dynamic and fluid as the students challenge one another. Students have engaged in a dialogue about the meaning of the text in a way that resists the usual teacher-initiation, student-response, teacher-evaluation pattern.

The content of what students discuss in May reflects the change in authority structure as well. The focus of the interaction is on a more general idea in the text--whether you could really feel the sun on your face in the same way that you can feel rain. There is no specific praising of ideas or parts of the story, and little emphasis on surface features such as number of pages. Instead, the students are struggling with a concept as well as trying to understand the meaning of the text.

Whereas early in the year students generally made comments about the whole story, and in December, students asked more questions and probed the specific content of the text, in May there is a real dialogue among members of the group with argumentation and an attempt at explanation. At least one student was challenging and refuting the idea implicit in the text. There is a lack of clarity at several points in the conversation as the students grapple with the idea of whether the sun and the rain are felt in the same way. The conversation seems to move from comparing the sun and the rain to a discussion about the rising and setting of the sun, perhaps because of the use of the words "come up" and "come down."

As the students engaged in discussion precipitated by the question, "How come you say rain can get in your face and sun can't get in your face," the interaction becomes complicated. For instance, when one student is asked to rephrase the boy's question, he says, "I think he said in the night the sun don't come up," indicating a possible misunderstanding of Billy's question. The conversational data suggest that the ideas and discourse itself are more complex in the May interactions. This discussion also highlights the overlap among understanding concepts, talking about texts, and the texts themselves.

Although the analysis of dialogue over three sessions in the year reveals some changes in authority structure and content of the discussions, some limitations are also evident. For instance, the teacher still expresses her control through designating who gets to be "the author" as well as encouraging the dialogue to move along to include other students' suggestions even when some students showed an interest in pursuing the topic. In addition, the teacher's own interpretations of the student/author's text may constrain alternative interpretations. For instance, in May she says, "No she means really come down and touch you." The teacher's interpretation may be consistent with the student/author's, but it may not be because we don't hear from the author again. The teacher may have silenced additional interpretations or responses.

Discussion

By comparing the October, December, and May interactions of students within the share sessions, it is possible to see shifts in several areas during the course of the school year. The authority role of the teacher has altered to some degree. Whereas the teacher was clearly in control of the interactions in the beginning of the year, there is a shift to a

more dynamic and fluid system. In the May session, different members of the class are in control at different moments in time including the student/author who defends her text when it is challenged by another student.

In terms of content, students focus increasingly on the ideas of the texts, rather than on surface features. Discussions focus on concepts and ideas expressed in texts near the end of the year. Students ask more questions near the end of the year and make fewer generic comments praising the story.

However, the classroom share sessions do not undergo a complete transformation in which students have learned to become completely self-sufficient during the share sessions. The teacher is still in control of the classroom and moves the discussion along when she considers it appropriate. The teacher provides her own interpretations of the text; her own interpretations may limit additional challenges from students. Although the dialogue became richer and more complex while focusing on ideas later on in the year, it is not clear if students really understood and developed the ideas of others. Students did respond and challenge ideas, yet students do not necessarily build upon one another's ideas in a traceable pattern. These limitations reflect the difficulty of changing classroom norms and of engaging students in rich, complex dialogue.

Why are classroom norms so difficult to change? What factors contribute to these difficulties? The need for classroom control is one of the strongest norms that seems to be the most resistant to change. Teachers are concerned that if they give up their authority by allowing students to continually interact or to dominate instructional talk that their classrooms will get out of control (Devaney and Sykes, 1988; Lortie, 1975). Other contextual factors impinge upon teachers' interactions in classrooms and limit changes in norms of authority and opportunities for children to meet together about writing. For instance, teachers cite the number of students they are expected to instruct as a significant constraint in their abilities to change (Devaney and Sykes, 1988; Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1986). External accountability systems, especially the influence of standardized tests, affect the ways teachers think about their teaching and can limit their willingness to provide opportunities for students to interact (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Finding enough time in the day to "cover the curricular content" and to allow daily writing and peer interactions is another problem teachers face in considering altering norms.

Besides external constraints in the teacher's workplace that limit altering norms, traditional conceptions of knowledge (Cohen, 1988) and traditional conceptions of writing (Applebee, 1986) can undermine attempts at changes in authority structures and in providing opportunities for students to learn from one another. If teachers hold the conception that they are the source of knowledge rather than students or that the purposes of writing are for assessment of skills, then their writing instruction and provision for peer interactions will remain limited. Teachers need access to programs such as the Teachers

College Writing Project that will provide a philosophy as well as examples and instructional processes to help teachers set up writing classrooms that will promote peer interaction. Widespread changes in the teaching of writing with the use of effective peer response will require teachers having access to knowledge bases as well as require alterations in the contextual constraints that surround teachers' work.

Although peer interactions may not be occurring on a widespread basis, nor do we have evidence that they are occurring in other subjects or situations in Ms. Johnson's classroom, it is hopeful to note that at least in one classroom, during writing time, a teacher was able to develop changing norms in her classroom to provide opportunities for students to respond. As demonstrated in this study, the teacher has altered the norms in her classroom and students have engaged in richer discourse during the share sessions. These changes have provided opportunities for students to talk about text and to learn from one another.

For students to learn to engage in complex dialogue to learn from one another, they will need many more opportunities in a variety of contexts to become accustomed to responding to their peers. Altering classroom norms in one context, such as writing time, may or may not carry over to changes in classroom norms in other contexts or subject areas such as mathematics. An interesting area for continued research would be to look at changes in the norms of interaction in a variety of subjects. Continued research can provide evidence of the consequences of altering traditional norms of classroom interaction in other classrooms with students of differing developmental ages in which students are having opportunities to interact.

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